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Home Literacy Environment: The Perceptions of Second Graders and Their Parents

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**Home Literacy Environment:
The Perceptions of Second Graders and Their Parents**

by

Kathryn Antoinette Gagnon

August 2009

**A thesis submitted to the
Department of Education and Human Development of
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Master of Science in Education**


Home Literacy Environment:

The Perceptions of Second Graders and Their Parents

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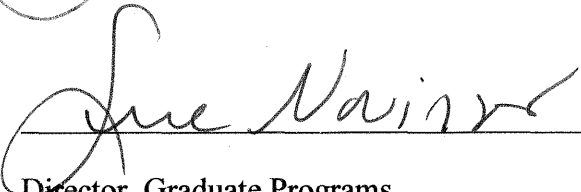
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Advisor



Date



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Chapter 1: Introduction

Several previous research studies have indicated that the home literacy environment has an effect on students' literacy skills and performance within the classroom (Haney & Hill, 2004; Padak & Rasinski, 2007; Rashid, Morris & Sevcik, 2005). In their review of several different at home literacy studies, Padak and Rasinski (2007) revealed that “what happens in the home makes a difference, for better or for worse” (p. 351). Furthermore, understanding how parents support their child’s early literacy skills and experiences is an important aspect to consider when creating a literacy program within the classroom in order to ensure that all students have the opportunities to maximize their potential as children with literacy skills (Haney & Hill, 2004).

In my review of research, I have yet to find a study that explores how parents and students describe their home literacy environment, and how these perceptions are similar or different. The purpose of this research study, then, was to explore the home literacy environment through the eyes of the students and their parents. I was not only interested in finding out what the students see and experience in their home in relationship to reading, writing, viewing and speaking, but also how the students' thoughts compare with how their parents see the home literacy environment. Understanding the literacy environment, and the funds of knowledge present there, are important aspects for teachers to consider when creating a balanced and student oriented literacy curriculum.

Problem Statement

While the classrooms in which I conducted this study were not my own, I did know that nothing like it has been done within those classrooms. The teachers knew vaguely what the home literacy environment was like for their students, only from what they had heard through informal conversations with students in school and their parents in conferences; however no formal investigation had ever been done. Therefore, I was interested in exploring the home literacy environment of these second grade students through their eyes and the eyes of their parents, so that their teachers may more fully understand them as literacy students.

Significance of Problem

The home literacy environment, while coupled with many other factors such as socioeconomic status, parent education level and cultural background, plays a significant role in how a child will perform within the classroom. Through conducting a study of this nature, the classroom teacher can better organize and plan for the kinds of literacy instruction techniques or activities that are necessary according to the information gathered from speaking with students and parents in the classroom about this environment in their home. The richer and more detailed the information gathered about this environment for each student, the easier it would be for the teacher to understand what a child may need more support in, or more encouragement in, within the classroom. Teachers can even begin to understand what

kinds of activities the students prefer so that those activities can be done more within the classroom to ensure students are enjoying their literacy instruction.

Whitmore and Norton-Meier (2008) reveal the importance of bringing school and home together, and how the sharing of knowledge of each is necessary for students to learn to their fullest potential. Whitmore and Norton-Meier (2008) discuss that this can only be done through an equal partnership between parents and teachers who are open with each other and trust each other in their roles within a student's life. This idea illustrates the importance of understanding the home literacy environment of students, because this knowledge can bring the home and school lives of a student even closer together, and foster the relationship between parents and teachers when it is more fully understood by both.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the home literacy environment of second graders in a suburban Upstate New York public elementary school. Throughout the study I explored the question: How do second graders and their parents perceive the home literacy environment?

As indicated earlier, it is important to understand all aspects of a child in order to ensure that the literacy techniques and lessons used in the classroom are appropriate for the child and what he/she truly needs to be able to enjoy him/herself and be successful in his/her literacy education.

Study Approach

In order to answer the research question, I asked the second graders to draw a picture of themselves reading or writing in their home. I then invited the students to discuss the picture and other aspects of their home literacy environment. I determined that conducting an open ended interview with students would be an effective and efficient method to gain rich and detailed information about each student's perspective on his or her literacy environment. I coupled this approach to data collection with a survey for parents that contained quantitative Likert scale statements and qualitative open ended questions to obtain the most accurate and comprehensive answers about each parent's perspective on the home literacy environment. I then compared the two perspectives.

Definition of Terms

Home literacy is a term I used throughout the study. It is defined as:

anything within the home that has something to do with literacy.

Through research this has shown to include parents reading, writing, viewing and speaking; children reading, writing, viewing and speaking; literacy activities done as a family; availability of literacy materials within the home or from a public library; and overall quality of the home, including noise level and cleanliness. (Whitmore and Norton-Meier, 2008)

Summary

Many studies have revealed how the home literacy environment plays an important part in the success that students do or do not have within the classroom (Rashid et al., 2005; Roberts, Jurgens & Burchinal, 2005). Therefore, the home literacy environment of students is an important aspect for teachers to understand when attempting to create a well balanced, child centered, literacy curriculum. To be better aware of this environment, teachers need to have information from the individuals who live in that environment so all perceptions are known. Through this study, I hoped to understand the home literacy environments of second graders from a suburban western New York elementary school clearly, so that I could help their classroom teacher better support them and the development of their literacy skills within the classroom environment, as well as refine study tools that could be used at a later date in other classrooms of my own, or colleagues.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Understanding how the home literacy environment of students plays a part in their growth as readers is an important part of studying this aspect of students; thus, this is where I will begin my exploration of current literature. In this chapter, I first discuss studies that have looked at the impact home literacy environments can have on the success of students in the literacy classroom. I then divide the idea of the home literacy environment into several sections, to better understand each aspect and how they each play a part in getting to know the literacy environment in each student's home. The ideas that I explore are the overall home environment, family literacy, student literacy activity, parents as models for their children, and the accessibility of literacy materials in the home.

Importance of Home Literacy Environment

Several studies have revealed the important role the home literacy environment plays in the success students do or do not have within the classroom (Rashid et al., 2005; Roberts, Jurgens & Burchinal, 2005). While many factors come into play--like socioeconomic status, parental literacy skill, maternal literacy techniques, teacher support—the home literacy environment is another factor that has some sort of effect, good or bad, on a student's skills in literacy. Through their review of several different at home literacy studies, Padak and Rasinski (2007)

support this idea as they reveal that “what happens in the home makes a difference, for better or for worse” (p. 351).

Through their case study of two parents, Whitmore and Norton-Meier (2008) pointed out that it is also important for teachers to understand that parents are there to help teachers with their students, and should not be viewed as a nuisance, or people who just want to make teaching difficult --which is, sadly, how some teachers view parents. The researchers had done a “long-term, ethnographic study about how sense of community can be established and nurtured in a highly diverse elementary school” and from this they found these two mothers, who were exceptionally interesting through their interactions with their children’s school (Whitmore & Norton-Meier, 2008, p. 451). The researchers focused closer on these mothers through interviews and observations, and found that through equal power and trust in the home-school relationship between parents and teachers, there can be outstanding outcomes in not necessarily the students’ progress and success in school, but at least their confidence and willingness to work hard to achieve their goals. Both parents and teachers need to trust each other to do their respective jobs either at home or in school, and they need to feel confident in their power to make decisions depending on their respective roles. Furthermore, teachers need to take the initiative to involve parents more, so that maybe they will have some positive effect on the home literacy environment of their students, which could in turn increase the productivity and success of their students within the classroom.

Whitmore and Norton-Meier (2008) explored the home literacy environment even further in their discussion of the funds of knowledge that can be obtained at home for students. They described how those two mothers and their families "used oral and written language to remember, create, express emotion, document, figure out, investigate, and relate to one another" and how this was them using literacy as "a tool to explore and use funds of knowledge for functional purposes" (p. 459). If teachers respect parents as also being teachers and models for students, then they can learn a lot about what that student struggles with, excels at, or enjoys in literacy. Understanding as many aspects of the student—including their home literacy environment—can only help teachers to better prepare themselves for educating each of their students to their highest potential.

Overall Home Environment

Research has shown that the quality of the home itself can have some effect on how a child performs within the classroom (Roberts et al., 2005). Roberts et al. (2005) examined the overall home environment of a number of students using an observational assessment called the "Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Inventory" (p. 347). This assessment took into account how parents create structure and stimulation for their children, the emotional climate and the kinds of basic interactions that take in the home between family members (Roberts et al., 2005). The HOME inventory was proved to be "one of the best single predictors of children's cognitive development through 8 years of age," so it is obvious that this

idea of overall home environment is an important aspect to explore to learn more about the home literacy environment of students, and how teachers can help support students in the classroom (Roberts et al., 2005, p. 348).

Johnson et al. (2008) examined several aspects that may affect students' literacy development to see how much they affected the students' success. The researchers looked closely at the home literacy lives of 455 kindergarten and first grade students who were enrolled in the Western Reserve Reading Project (WRRP)—how many books they took home from school, how often they read on their own for pleasure, if their abilities were moderated by their mother's abilities, as well as how the quality of their home environment as a whole affected their expressive vocabulary. The WRRP itself was a 9 year longitudinal study, and the authors of this article looked at these students only for a glimpse compared to the 9 years they would be enrolled in this program. The researchers looked at aspects related to household chaos, the home literacy environment, and maternal reading ability. Johnson et al. (2008) looked for correlations between these various aspects and the students' early reading ability, and while they found that there was only a low correlation between the order and quietness of the house and the ability level student, it was still believed to be aspect of the students' lives that should be paid attention to when looking into home factors that can affect them.

Family Literacy

There is no one set definition of what family literacy actually is because, as Jay and Rohl (2005) revealed, defining family literacy is not an easy task since it is not simply just combining the meanings of the two words family and literacy. They list a few attempts that several other researchers have made at defining family literacy: “a description of what happens around literacy in children’s homes;” “an educational program in which particular literacy practices are introduced to parents and sometimes their children as well;” and “parental ‘transfer of behavior, beliefs, practices, expectations and potential to their progeny’” (p. 59). No matter how it is specifically defined, family literacy always has to do with when family members partake in some sort of literacy activity together, learning and growing in each of their literacy skills (Feiler & Logan, 2007). However, within the home, such literacy activities are not exclusive to parent/child partnership. Jay and Rohl (2005) illuminated the idea that “the term ‘family’ within the context of family literacy may not mean that of mother and/or father and siblings,” as children in their home environment “may be influenced by a number of related and unrelated adults and children, covering two or more generations” (p. 59). Therefore, when exploring this aspect of the home literacy environment, it is important to understand the different people who are present in the home of the student, not just family members.

In their study, Marrow, Kuhn and Schwanenflugel (2006) taught parents the best ways to interact with their children and school literacy materials in the home through introducing a program into the school their children attended: the Family

Fluency Program. The purpose of the program was to see if parents who were involved in the Family Fluency Program “increased their literacy involvement at home...engaged in fluency building activities at home” and had a better awareness of why all of this is important for their child’s literacy achievement (Morrow, Kuhn, & Schwanenfluge, 3006, p. 328). This program sent basal readers home with the students twice a week for “parents and children to echo-read”, and it also offered “three evening workshops for parents in October, February, and April” (2006, p326). Each workshop gave parents new ways in which they could help their children become fluent readers at home, asked what parents and students liked or disliked about the program and commended parents for being so involved in their students’ school lives. It was found that parents who were involved in the program were learning fluency strategies to teach their children at home, and were engaged in more fluency and literacy activities at home. Through their study, the researchers found that teaching parents several effective ways to engage their children in literacy activities in the home actually increased the frequency of the activities, as well as increased the students’ skills in literacy within the classroom—thus showing how important family literacy activities are to a child’s literary future.

Finally, while parents or guardians are not the only ones involved in their child’s family literacy, they do play a large role a child’s primary teacher in the family literacy aspect of the home literacy environment. Haney and Hill (2004) wanted to explore the impact parents have when they act as teachers for their children. In their study, the researchers looked at how often (or if ever) parents directly taught literacy

strategies or ideas (like letter names, letter sounds, printing letters, writing words or reading words), and what effect that might have on those students' emergent literacy skills. Haney and Hill (2004) chose 47 preschool children by inviting students ages three to five who were attending the Child Development Center on a Northwest Georgian college campus to participate. Data was collected through parental surveys, and the Kaufman Survey of Early Academic and Language Skills (K-SEALS) and the Test of Early Reading Ability—Third Edition (TERA-3) were administered to the students. Through this study, it was found that generally the more a parent claimed that they had direct teaching of literacy skills to their child, the higher the child scored on the test, thus having an effect on their literacy abilities in the school setting. Haney and Hill (2004) found that understanding how parents contribute to their child's literacy life is an important part of understanding a child's literacy environment within the home.

Knowing what parents do with their children as far as literacy activities in the home is an important aspect of understanding this environment, as well as what other activities are done with family members in the home (i.e.: reading together, conversing with one another, playing word games together, or even viewing an educational show on television together), and careful attention should be paid to such interactions when exploring the home literacy environment of students.

Student Literacy Activity

A student literacy activity refers to an event that the child initiates on his or her own that involves interaction with literacy materials within the home, whether it be reading (i.e.: a book, magazine, newspaper), writing (i.e.: a story, in a journal, a letter), speaking (i.e.: with a parent, a stuffed animal or pet, a sibling) or viewing (i.e.: a television show, a movie). Roberts et al. (2005) believed that it is important to pay attention to the frequency of such activities and how much a child enjoys it, as this can reveal the student's attitude towards literacy.

That was one of the aspects that was focused on in the study Roberts et al. (2005) conducted: how often students engage in literacy activities at home, and how much they enjoy those activities. The researchers studied seventy-two African American students and their mothers or primary guardians annually between 18 months and 5 years of age—the observation of literacy development for each of these students began from infancy. The researchers observed the students with their mothers and interviewed the mothers as well. The “children’s receptive and expressive language and vocabulary were assessed annually between 3 years of age and kindergarten entry, and emergent literacy skills were assessed at 4 years and kindergarten entry” using the Test of Early Reading Ability (Roberts et al. 2005, p. 345). Roberts et al. (2005) looked for correlations between the scores of the students and their frequency and enjoyment of engaging in literacy activities (as well as other factors like shared reading time, and maternal reading strategies), and found that these activities did have a correlation with the assessment scores; thus frequency and

enjoyment of such activities for students should be understood by their teacher to better support them within the classroom.

Many teachers ask students to complete a daily reading log to show how much they have read. This may be used to show a student's frequency of reading at home, but it is also important to find out whether students read for pleasure beyond what is assigned for school. This attitude towards reading and other literacy activities is important to understand, as it may hinder students' literacy skills if they only read because they have to (Roberts et al. 2005; Faires, Nichols & Rickelman, 2000).

Parent as Models

Parents play a very important role in creating the foundation of their children's education and development as readers (Faires, Nichols & Rickelman, 2000). For this aspect of the home literacy environment, it is important to not only understand what parents are seen doing in the home that has to do with literacy (i.e.: reading on their own, writing a letter or a list, speaking with another adult, or watching television) but also how parents seem to treat these ideas of literacy and activities having to do with literacy. Durkin captured the importance of parents in a student's literary life perfectly when she wrote how important it is for students to have:

“parents who spend time with their children; who read to them; who answer their questions and their requests for help; and who demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation, information and contentment.”--as cited in Padak and Rasinski, 2007, p. 350

Durkin's words touch not only on the idea of children viewing their parents involved in day-to-day literacy activities, but also how parents themselves promote literacy as an enjoyable pastime, not just something necessary for work. It is important to pay attention to how often, or if ever, children see their parental figures reading for enjoyment, since parents or guardians are a major role model for children and they base a lot of their attitudes off of their parents' attitudes (Johnson et al., 2008).

Another important aspect of parents as models for children at home is that "parents are children's first and primary teachers" (Faires, Nichols & Rickelman, 2000, p. 195). Children often learn by watching what others do, and since parents are important teachers within a child's life, they can be great models of engaging themselves in literacy activities within their everyday lives--showing their children why literacy is not only an important part of life, but a fun and fulfilling part of life as well.

Access to Literacy Materials

To have a rich home literacy environment, children need access to literacy materials, like books, magazines and newspapers, within the home (Korat, Klein & Segal-Drori, 2006). Korat, Klein and Segal-Drori (2006) recognized that these materials are not only present in the home, but are also materials that are borrowed from school or public libraries. Their study focused on the impact a student's socioeconomic status may have on their skills in the classroom. In their research,

Korat, Klein and Segal-Drori (2007) chose ninety-four 5-6 year olds to participate, fifty-four of them being girls and forty being boys—as well as their mothers to participate in this study. The students were picked from 41 different kindergarten rooms in urban neighborhoods in Israel, all from Jewish Hebrew-speaking homes. The researchers took into account “the education level, the profession and the occupation of the father and mother, and the family’s income level” to calculate the SES levels (Korat, Klein, & Segal-Drori, 2007, p. 368). Data on these students was collected in 3 sessions, looking at the children’s emergent literacy level within school premises, mother-child joint storybook reading at home, as well as demographic and home literacy environment information given by the mothers. This was done through observations, interviews and assessments of print concept, word recognition phonological awareness, letter naming, and emergent reading of a familiar book. Because they were focusing on the SES of students, literacy materials in the home came into play, because many families could not afford a variety of materials to offer their children in the home--which proved to be a detriment to the students and their literary activities within the home, as well as their skill level and engagement in school (Korat, Klein, & Segal-Drori, 2007).

Crawford and Zygouris-Coe (2006) also supported this notion of the importance of literacy materials being accessible to students within the home as they say that "mere access to quality books can have a significant impact on children's attitudes and achievement in literacy learning" (p. 264). Through their review of research, Crawford and Zygouris-Coe (2006) found that the quality of the materials

has an effect as well, not just the availability, so quantity is not as important as the quality of the materials students have access to in the home. They claim that students need to be able to interact with these materials at home, where they are more comfortable and can have individual time where they do not feel rushed, like they might feel in school with all of their peers around.

Summary

Many aspects of the home literacy environment, including parents as models through their independent literacy activities, student literacy activities, the overall quality of the home environment, access a child has to literacy materials and family literacy activities come into play for each child and can have an effect on their literacy work in school. Teachers need to understand what life is like at home for students, who and what they interact with on a daily basis and the quality or quantity of such interactions, who they have as models and how those people choose to interact with literacy materials on their own, and generally what kind of home the students live in (i.e.: quiet, clean, filled with literacy materials to use). Each of these factors plays an important role in a student's literacy development, and understanding each of these factors as it stands within each students' home literacy environment enables teachers to create an enriching and fulfilling student centered literacy curriculum.

Chapter 3: Methods

A students' home literacy environment is understood to be vast and complex and includes aspects such as availability of literacy materials, frequency and enjoyment of reading freely, overall environment quality, viewing adults or siblings reading, engaging in reading in some manner with adults or siblings, as well as how often a student borrows reading materials from school or a library (Rashid, Morris and Sevcik, 2005). I explored all such aspects through this study from the thoughts and ideas of second grade students and their parents, as understanding this environment is important when trying to create a well balanced and influential literacy program in any classroom.

Research Question

How do second graders and their parents perceive the home literacy environment?

Participants and Context

I chose the second grade students and their parents based on convenience--the students are in a colleague's school. I sought participants from a total of three second grade classrooms, since I had very little turnout using only one classroom, in a suburban public school in western New York. From these three classrooms I had a total of ten students who were allowed to participate, as well as nine parents willing to participate (although only eight responded with a survey). Because I was looking

to be able to compare both student answers and parent answers, only sixteen participants (eight students and their parents) are included in my findings and conclusions.

Classroom A was comprised of 20 students (12 boys and 8 girls), several of whom receive support services including ESL (one student), speech (three students), Academic Intervention Services (six students for math, three students for ELA), and counseling services (five students). This class was made up of eight Caucasian students, four Hispanic students, seven African American students and one Asian American student. Sixteen students from classroom A received free or reduced lunches. According to the Degree of Reading Ability assessment, the students' reading abilities ranged from early first grade level to third grade level (level 12-34) with over half the class at the end of second grade (level 28) or higher. Three students from this classroom and three of their parents participated in my study.

Classroom B held 22 students (11 boys and 11 girls), 15 of which received free or reduced lunches. Services provided to students within this classroom included Academic Intervention Services (three students for math, three students for ELA), speech (one student), ESL (four students), and counseling services (one student). This class had ten Caucasian students, two Hispanic students, seven African American students and three Asian American students. According to the Degree of Reading Ability assessment, the students' reading abilities in classroom B ranged from early first grade level to the middle of third grade level (level 12-36) with only

four students scoring below the end of second grade level (28). Three students from this classroom and three of their parents participated in my study.

Finally, Classroom C was comprised of 20 students (ten boys and ten girls) with several students receiving special services like counseling (four students), Academic Intervention Services (two students for math, seven students for ELA), and speech (three students). Eight students from this classroom received free or reduced lunches. In classroom C there were 13 Caucasian students, two Hispanic students and five African American students. According to the Degree of Reading Ability assessment, the students' reading abilities in this class ranged from the middle of second grade level to the beginning of fourth grade level (level 24-40) with the majority of students at the end of second grade/beginning of third grade levels (levels 28/30). Two students from this classroom and their parents participated in my study.

Each of the three second grade classrooms had a different daily schedule, but all included many of the same activities: morning meeting and math talk; specials (a four day rotation of library, physical education, art and music); writing workshop and reading workshop; lunch; math and content subjects such as science and social studies.

The school used in this study was a kindergarten through second grade building with approximately 290 students and was one of the district's 13 public elementary schools. The district also included three middle schools, three high schools and one middle/high school building.

Data Collection and Analyses

I gathered data through three sources: individual conversations with the second graders, drawings created by the second graders of themselves reading or writing at home, and surveys for the parents. I began the discussions with students by asking them to describe the picture they had drawn (see Appendix A), and continued the conversation according to a list of 12 topics to be covered (see Appendix B), while the survey for parents had seven Likert scale statements and six open ended response questions (see Appendix C). I conducted the individual conversations during regular school hours in a small bookroom next to classroom A, and I sent the parent surveys home with the students, to be returned to the classroom teachers.

I tape recorded the conversations with individual students, taking brief notes during each; one student was not allowed to be audio taped so I wrote down everything shared during that conversation. I transcribed each interview verbatim. I then read and reread each student's conversation, coding the data for patterns or trends. During the coding process, I was careful to note outliers in students' responses as a way to show differentiated home literacy environments and practices of the students and their families.

For the survey data gathered from the parents, I counted and then graphed the outcomes of the Likert scale statements. I then read and reread each parent's responses to the open ended questions, coding the data for patterns or trends, being careful to note outliers in the parents' responses, similar to what was done with the student interviews. I then compare the data given by the students and their parents to

find similarities and differences in perspectives of the home literacy environment for each student, as the topics, statements and questions are relatively similar in nature and information being sought.

Criteria for Validity

I attempted to ensure validity of my study in a few ways. I be gathering data through several sources, thus creating triangulation of the data so that I was more confident in my findings. I used terms and phrases used by the participants in my study within my findings and outcomes, giving my study referential adequacy. Furthermore, during my conversations with the second graders I rephrased and said back many of their answers, to ensure that I understood what they were saying, and so that they could correct my understanding if I was wrong. Finally, the findings of my study came directly from the data gathered, which is available for review, showing the dependability of the findings.

Procedures

After I received permission to conduct the study from both The College at Brockport, SUNY Institutional Review Board and the school principal, I sent permission slips to all 20 parents, asking them to participate in this research study (see Appendix D). They were given approximately one week to return the consent form. After that given week, I had only received two permission forms back (only one for both parent and child), so I sought and received permission from The College

at Brockport, SUNY Institutional Review Board to expand my research into two other second grade classrooms within the same building. After sending permission forms home to those 42 students, and giving their parents a week and a half to respond, I received eight more responses (two from the original classroom, and the other six from the added rooms. I then sought assent from those ten students for them to participate (see Appendix E), had them draw a picture of themselves reading or writing at home, and scheduled a series of visits to the school to conduct individual interviews with the students. Each individual conversation took approximately 12 minutes, beginning with a discussion of the drawing they had made. The entire process with individual students will took approximately five days. The parents were given one week to return the survey, and any parents who do not return it within the week were sent reminders and given a few more days to respond (eight of the nine parents who agreed to participate returned their survey with their child).

Positionality

For this study, I was an outsider coming into classrooms where I was unfamiliar with the students and they were unfamiliar with me. What I did have knowledge about for this study were aspects of teaching and best practices for teaching and communicating with students that I learned through student teaching, my experience as a substitute teacher, as well as all of the education classes I have taken through undergraduate and graduate programs. My experiences in student teaching were also related directly to the topic of this study because I worked in a

literacy clinic for my first student teaching placement. That experience, in addition to my graduate level classes, gave me knowledge specific to the topic of literacy in an elementary school setting.

Limitations

There were several factors that limited my study. The size of my student sample was small, with eight students and eight of their parents. The location of the school and the particular demographics of the second grade classrooms limited my ability to generalize the findings to other classrooms and contexts. The sources of data also limited my study. More detailed data might have been gathered through parent interviews conducted in the home, where I could have not only spoken with the parents face to face, but I could have also gotten a glimpse of the home literacy environment for each student myself.

I believe that the small population of students who were given permission by their parents to participate, as well as the parents who were willing to participate, has to do with several factors: parents' lack of interest, parents' uneasiness with the study's topic, perhaps they did not want to be embarrassed thinking their home literacy environment is not up to par with someone else's standards, or they were uncomfortable with divulging information to someone they did not know. I realize that this may have been the most common reason, because after all, they did not know me. I was not a person the students or their families were familiar with or knew in any other manner. The other possibilities could have come into play in the minds of

some parents as well. I also feel that I probably would have been given more detailed answers from both students and parents if I were the students' actual classroom teacher because they would have felt more comfortable conferring with me.

Chapter 4: Findings

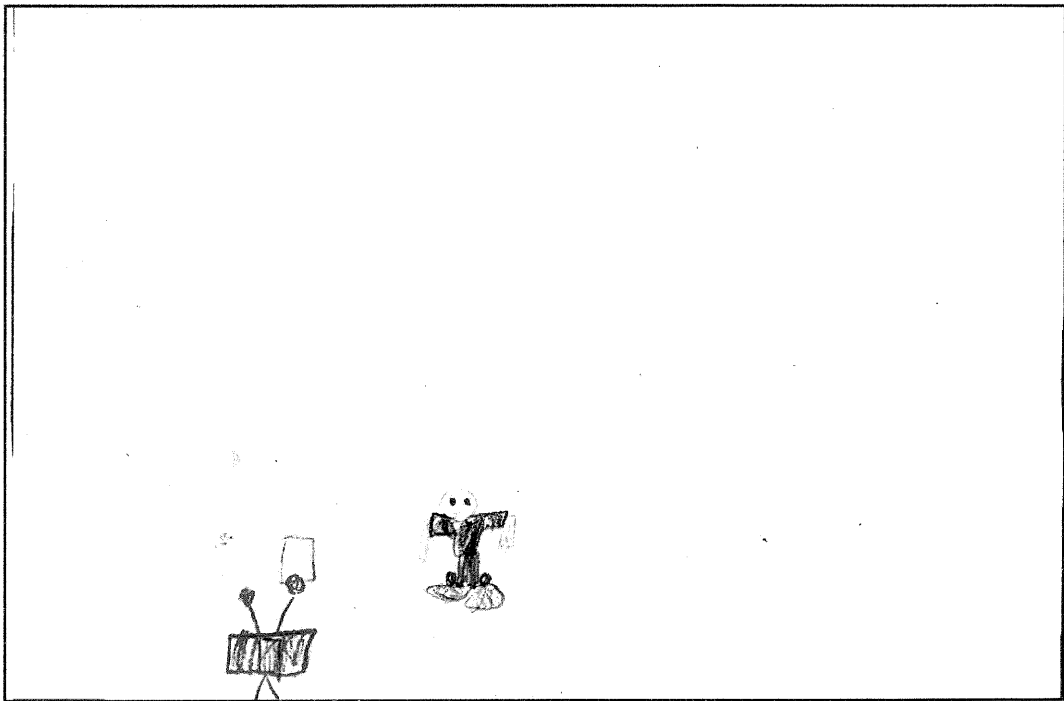
The purpose of this study was to explore the home literacy environment of second grade students, in a suburban elementary school, through the eyes of the students as well as their parents. I was interested in finding out what the home literacy environment was like, and how the descriptions of students and parents compared, and sought to answer these inquiries through my research question: How do second graders and their parents perceive the home literacy environment? To gather information related to the question, I had the eight students draw a picture of themselves reading or writing at home, and then had a conversation regarding this picture as well as the list of 12 topics (see Appendix B). To gather information from the parents, I sent home a survey with seven Likert scale statements, and six open ended questions (see Appendix C), which was returned to school with the student.

In this chapter, I present my conversations with the students, their drawings, and the data collected from parents through surveys. I begin by sharing each student's conversation with me, and then look across all conversations and drawings through each aspect of literacy. Next, I share the data gathered from the parent survey, first individually then collectively. I conclude the chapter by looking across the students' and parents' perceptions, how they compare to each other, and what I understand from the as a result of the study.

Conversations with Students

Each student (5 boys, 3 girls; ages ranged from 7.8-8.4 years) began our conversation by describing what he or she was doing in the drawing. All eight students described themselves reading, offering specific book titles as examples of what they read, and one student (Student A) also described himself viewing or watching television. All of the students' drawings are included in this chapter along with their thoughts on the 12 topics we discussed together during our conversation.

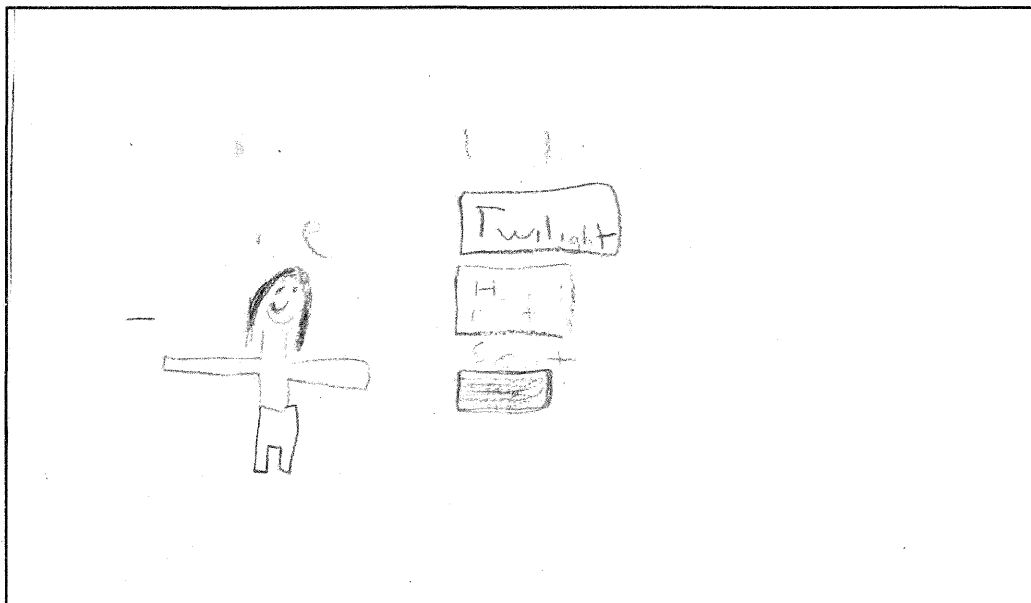
Figure 4.1: Student A's Drawing



Student A started off our conversation by describing himself watching television in his drawing, and explaining that he watches television by himself. When we talked about reading he told me that he reads chapter books at home for school,

and that he also reads to his younger sister but nobody else. Even though he said they do not read directly to him, he did say that he saw his mom read "really long chapter books" at home. Student A informed me that he does not really write at home, but he sees his mom writing even though he was not sure what exactly she writes about. When talking with people at home was discussed, he really did not have much to say because according to him, he does not really talk much to people at home except for what happened at school that day. Student A visits the public library to borrow books, and also has lots of books and paper but he does not "really have any pencils because [his] little sister takes them and throws them every place and then [he] and his mom try to find them but [they] can't." While he prefers to do his literacy activities at school, his favorite place to read at home is his bedroom because his sister does not bother him there.

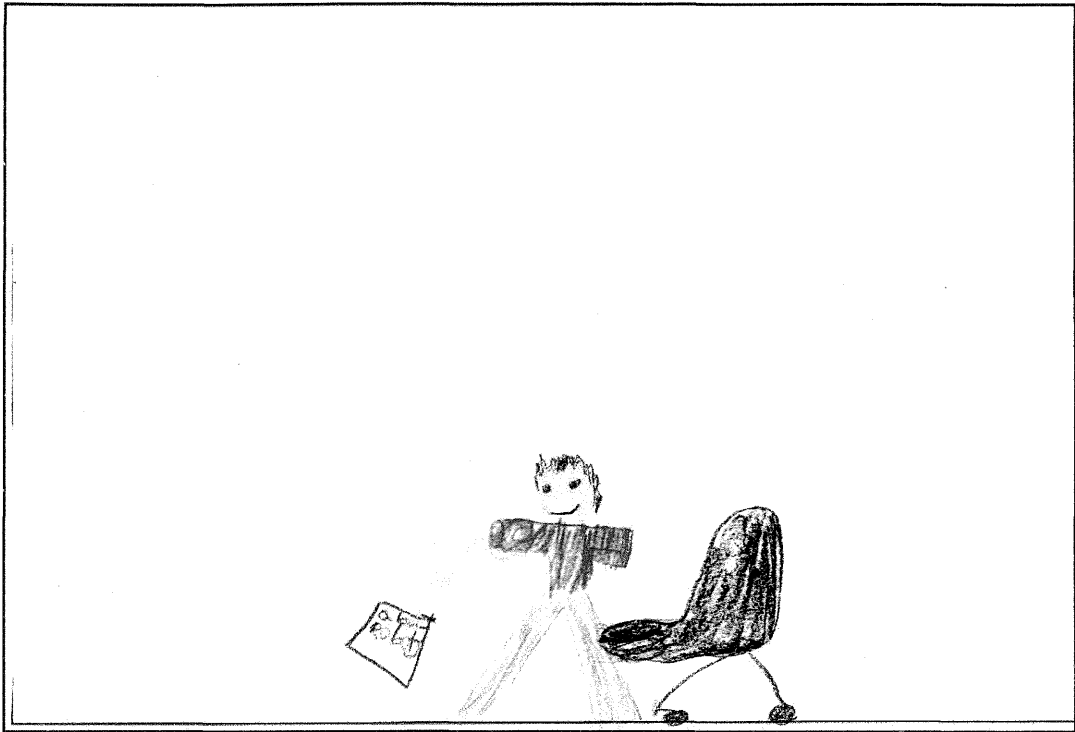
Figure 4.2: Student B's Drawing



Student B began describing, in great detail, her drawing in which she is reading some of her favorite books *Twilight* and *Hannah Montana* because those "books are kinda getting interesting." She told me that she did not draw herself writing in the drawing because she does not really write at home, except for when she writes a bit on the computer. She told me that she mostly reads by herself because she "likes to read in her head," and that no one else reads to her at home. She enjoys reading in her room at home because it is nice and quiet. Student B does not see too many people read at home, but when she does see her mom or brother read, they are normally reading "grown up books and stuff." As we moved onto writing, Student B told me that she sometimes sees her mom and dad write, but she does not know what they write about. She watches television and movies, sometimes by herself, sometimes with parents, and sometimes with a little boy who she babysits sometimes. Student B has access to books and paper at home, but likes school better than home because you have a lot of paper and good writing paper there and you have colored pencils and crayons and all that. At home we don't have a lot of books, so school is a better place because I like reading at home but they've got more stuff there.

Student B also told me that at home she talks with her parents about what she did at school that day, what things she had fun with and any plans for the weekend or weekends to come.

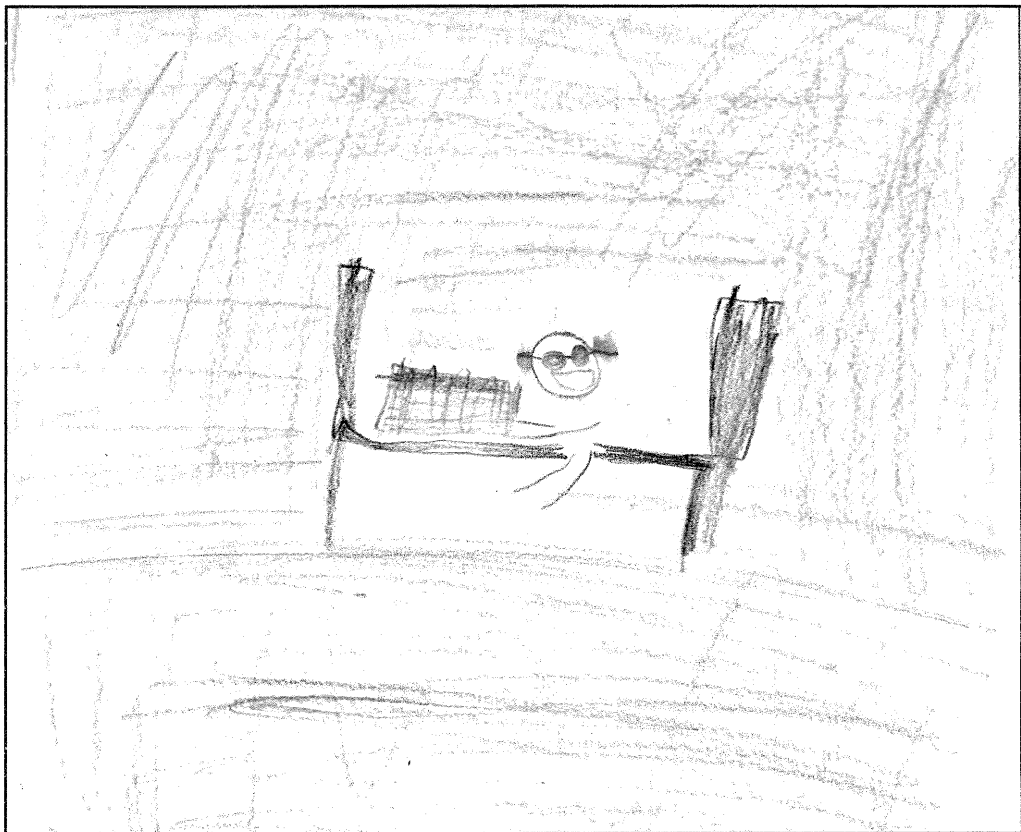
Figure 4.3: Student C's Drawing



My conversation with **Student C** began with him describing himself sitting in a chair in his study room reading, which is his favorite place to read at home because he likes “to spin in the chair” while he reads. He told me that he mostly reads by himself, unless he wants company, then he reads giant books. Student C also told me that he sees his older brothers read at home. For writing, he said he does not write much at home, but he sees his mom write sometimes even though he was unsure of what kinds of things she wrote. He likes to watch *Scooby Doo* movies and *Tom and Jerry* cartoons at home, sometimes by himself, but most of the time with his brothers or his parents on “family night.” Student C told me that he does not really talk with

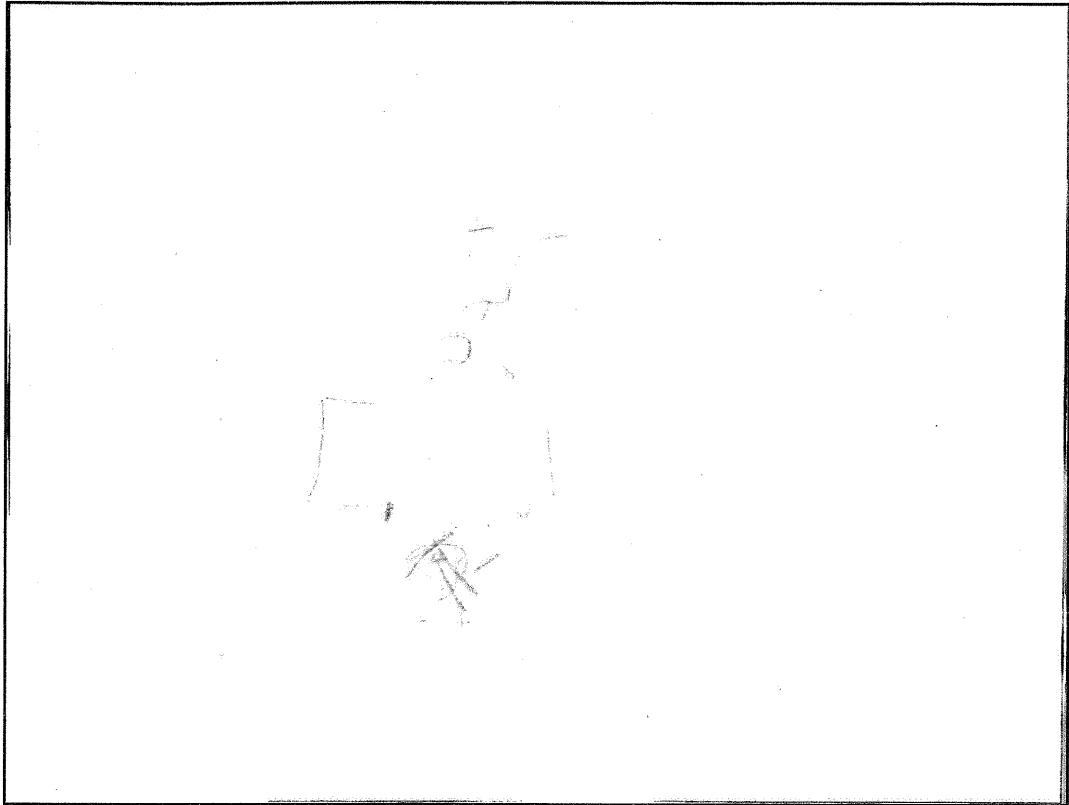
anyone at home, after school or on the weekends. When we discussed literacy materials he has available at home, he said again that he does not really write at home, but also included reading as something he does not do at home. Student C changed his answers about reading at home several times, as he later told me that he likes to read and write at home in his study room because it is his favorite room and the computer is there, and he prefers to engage in literacy activities at home. He also told me that he visits the library to borrow books sometimes.

Figure 4.4: Student D's Drawing



Student D (who was not audio-taped during the conversation) described himself reading to his dog in his bed in his drawing, explaining that this was his favorite place to read and write at home because “it is comfortable” and he can lie down. He also reads to his mom and dad. At home he has a chance to see his older sister, who is nine, reading. Student D enjoys drawing pictures and writing stories to go along with them by himself. He has opportunities to see his sister writing for homework at home, and his mother writing on the computer. He told me that at home he talks about stuff at school with his mom, and he talks about his feelings with his sister. At home, Student D has a lot of books but no magazines, he also has access to pencils, markers, paper and computers to use for writing. He sometimes visits the public library for other books that he does not have at home. He watches cartoons and movies both by himself and with his family at home. Student D prefers to engage in literacy activities at home because he can do whatever activity he wants.

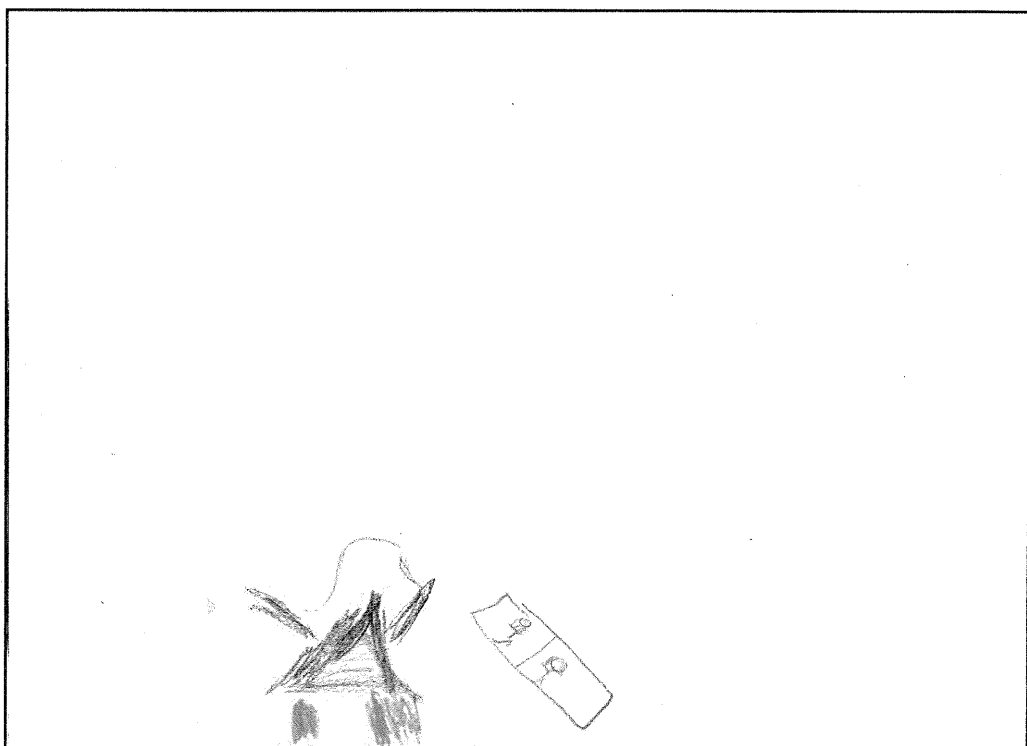
Figure 4.5: Student E's Drawing



Student E started off our conversation by describing himself “laying down reading a book on the floor under his kitchen table;” he likes to read there because he “can clean up dog hair and read at the same time.” He likes to read by himself and with his mom and dad by alternating pages while reading aloud. At home, Student E sees his aunt and grandma reading the newspaper. When we discussed writing at home, Student E informed me that he writes “math stuff,” and most of his writing is really “just for homework” done by himself. He sees his mom and dad writing. His “mom tries to figure out how much money [his] dad is going to bring home, and [his] dad does the same thing.” At home, Student E likes to watch shows like *Spongebob*

Squarepants and *iCarly*, sometimes by himself and sometimes with his dad. He told me that he talks to adults in his house about what he did at school every day. Student E has access to "more than 200 books" and also borrows books from the library sometimes, however he "really only has writing materials for his homework." He prefers to engage in literacy activities at home, because he "just likes it there."

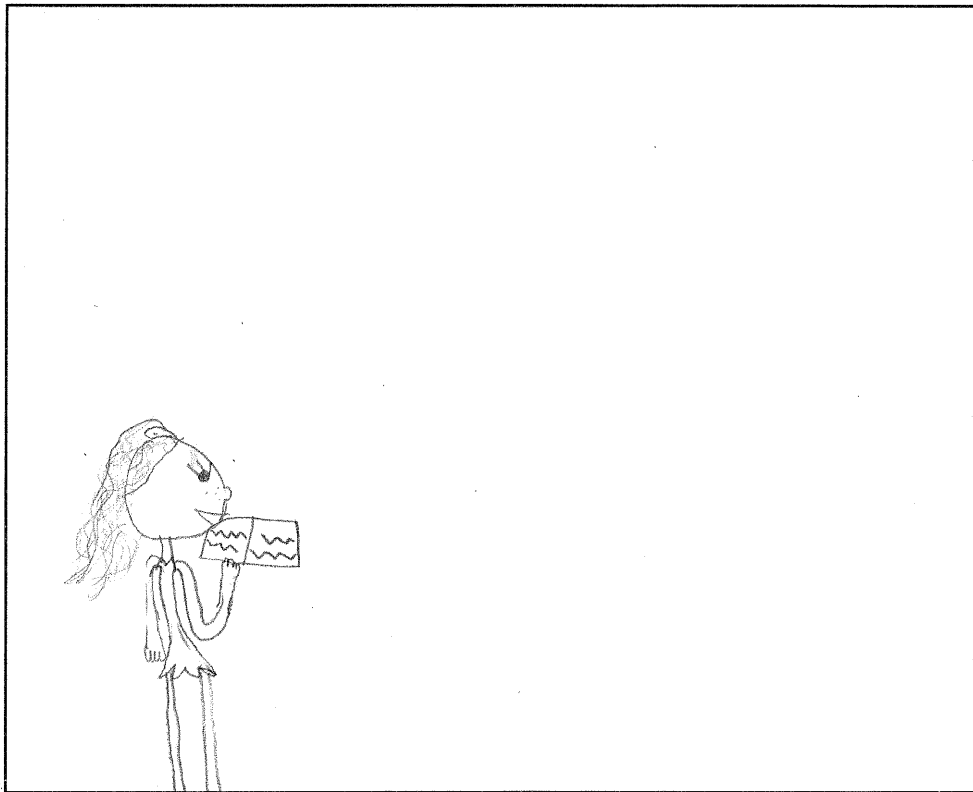
Figure 4.6: Student F's Drawing



Student F began our conversation by describing her drawing as one of her laying down a book and reading it. She said loves to read at home because "it's nice and quiet because everything is all settled down." When she reads at home she likes to read in the basement, either by herself or with her dad. She sees her dad and mom

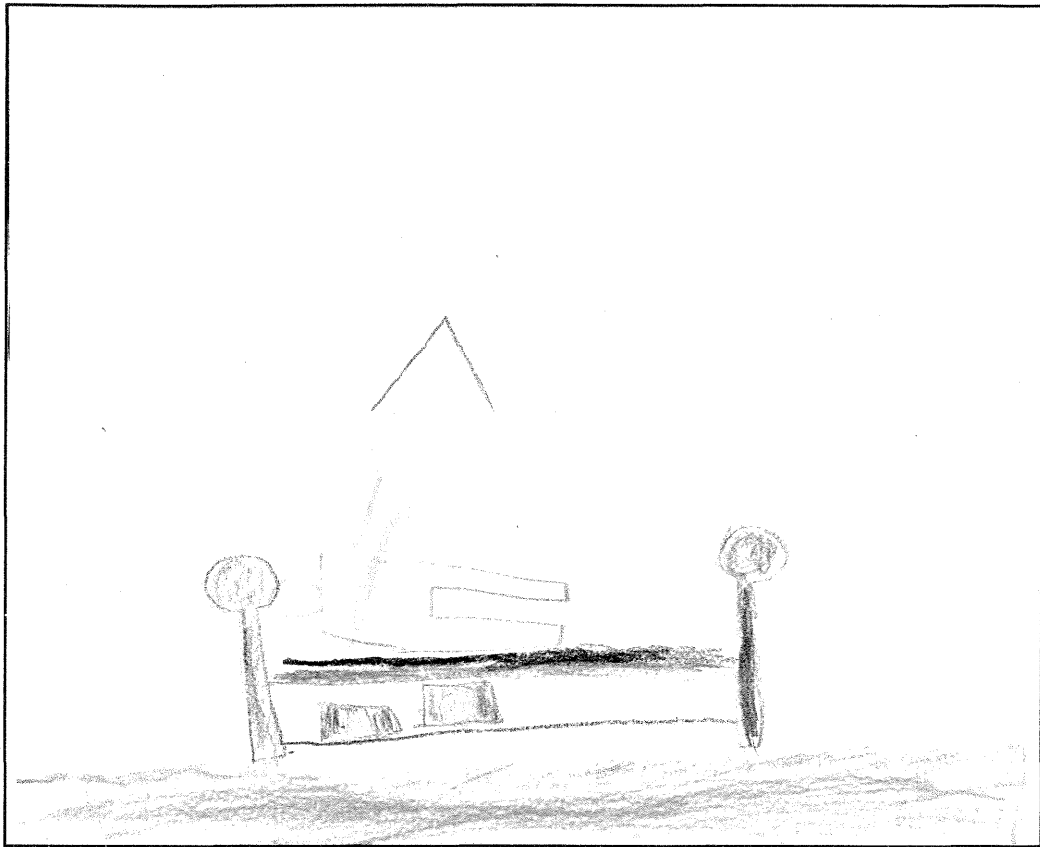
reading at home, as well as her older brother sometimes. When we discussed writing at home, Student F said that she writes stories with her brother and then acts them out. She sees her mom and dad writing bills at home. Student F watches television and movies with many people at home, including her mother, her brother and a boy that her mom babysits. She likes to talk about plans and school with people at home. Student F has access to books at home and goes to the Greece Public Library to borrow books she does not have access to at home.

Figure 4.7: Student G's Drawing



My conversation with **Student G** began with her describing herself reading one of her favorite books, *The Tiara Club: Princess Sophia and the Magical Pony*, in her drawing. At home, she enjoys reading in her bedroom by herself, and with her mom and dad. Student G explained that she sometimes sees both of her parents reading: her mom reads random stories but she does not really know exactly what, and her dad likes to read history books. When we discussed writing at home, Student G explained that she likes writing story books and typing on the computer by herself; her mom helps her when she is writing her homework. She has opportunities to see her parents writing: her mom writes checks and bills and notes for school, and her dad writes for work sometimes. Student G enjoys watching television with her brother and sometimes by herself; sports and the Disney channel are two of her favorites. She also watches her brother playing at the computer. Student G talks about shopping with her mom and topics revolving around the army with her dad. She also talks about the Disney channel or Cartoon Network with her brother. Student G has access to a lot of books both at home and from the public library; she even said that she has her own bookshelf for her books at home. She also has access to a magazine called *What's What?* as well as Disney magazines. She has paper, pencils and the computer to write with at home. Student G prefers engaging in literacy activities at school "because there are more books and more varieties and [they] do buddy reading."

Figure 4.8: Student H's Drawing



My conversation with **Student H** began with him describing his drawing of him reading in his bed, which is his favorite place to read at home because he "can sit and lay down and relax" there. He reads by himself at home, as well as sometimes with his mom, dad or younger sister. He also sees those people reading at home, his mom and sister share books, but he was not sure about what his dad reads because it is not that often that he sees his dad reading. When he writes at home, Student H mostly writes for homework by himself, or sometimes with his mom and sister. He also sees his sister write for her homework, and sees his mom and dad sign the

homework. Student H explained that he watches movies with his dad, and cartoons on television by himself. When he talks to people at home, Student H talks about what happened at school, and plans they have for fun things to do. Student H has access to a lot of books at home, and at both the school library and the public library, he even has his own card. He explained that the writing materials he has at home are just for homework, and the computer. Student H prefers to engage in literacy activities at school because it "is the normal place to do it," or "it's like where you do it so much."

Looking Across the Drawings and Conversations

Looking across the drawings and conversations with the eight students offers a chance for me to see similarities and differences in their experiences and how they perceive their home literacy practices.

Reading

Reading was a major topic of discussion with all students. When we discussed people the students read with besides when they read by themselves, six students (Students A, D, E, F, G and H) responded that they read with a parent or sibling, one student (Student D) even mentioned that he reads to his dog. Student B said no one else reads with her, but she shared "I don't really read out loud. I read in my head." When I asked her if anyone reads to her, since she does not like to read out loud, she said "No." The other student (Student C) who explained that he only

reads by himself at home said, "My dad reads to my brother, but nobody reads to me." All eight students shared that they saw at least one other person in their house reading by themselves; these people included older siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts and cousins. While they were each able to say who read at home, very few were able to say what they read. Student H described the books his mom read because she shared books with his older sister.

When we discussed where each student likes to read at home, their responses varied—bedroom, study/computer room, basement, living room, under the kitchen table. The students, however, were in agreement in that they enjoy quiet places where they are undisturbed.

In several drawings, students drew themselves reading, or with books. Student B drew herself with several of her favorite books, including *Twilight* and *Hannah Montana*. Students C, D and H each drew themselves in their favorite place to read at home: Student C in his study room, and Students D and H in their beds. Students C and H drew themselves reading alone, while Student D drew himself reading to his dog. Students E, F and G all drew themselves reading in a nondescript place.

In terms of reading materials available at home, all students explained that they have lots of books to read at home. Students E and G shared that they have magazines that they read at home, and every student claimed to go to the library at least a few times a year; four of the students (Students A, C, D, and H) claimed to go at least every few weeks. The other four students (Students B, E, F and G) explained

that they preferred school better than home because there are more books that they could read.

Writing

Writing was another area of literacy that I discussed with the students. When we discussed the students' writing habits at home in general, four of the students (Students A, C, E and H) said that they do not write very much at all while at home—only for homework or other times when they had to. The other four students (Students B, D, F and G) shared that they do other forms of writing besides for homework such as writing stories either by hand or on the computer. Student F explained very excitedly, "I write stories. Like me and my brother will write stories and then we'll read them, and then we'll make a play out of them." Every student said that they saw someone else writing by themselves at home, either a parent or a sibling. The four students (Students D, F, G and H) who said they saw siblings writing at home explained that their siblings were writing for homework. All eight students said that they have see their parents writing at home, but only three (Students E, F and G) were able to give some examples of what their parents wrote (bills or things for work). Student E explained that his parents only wrote about "trying to figure out how much money they would bring home." Every student claimed to have writing materials at home (paper, pencils, colored pencils, markers, computers), but one student (Student H) claimed the only materials were homework materials.

Speaking

The third aspect of literacy I discussed with the students focused on speaking at home. Students A and C shared that they did not talk to anyone about anything at home. The six other students explained that they talk about school and weekend plans with their parents. Two of these students (Students D and G) also talked about how they spoke with a sibling at home about their feelings or television shows that they like.

Viewing

I also discussed with the students the different forms of viewing they do at home. Every student said that they watch television or movies—seven of the students said they sometimes watched by themselves and sometimes with other people (parents, siblings, cousins, kids that their parents babysit) while Student A said that he only watched by himself. Student F also shared some other things she likes to view by herself at home besides television as she explained, "I love rainy days because then I can see all the rain. And I love seeing floods like when it is really rainy because I love to see cars splash through the water." Every student said that they have access to at least one television to view at home.

Student A was the only student to draw themselves viewing something. He drew himself watching television by himself.

Discussion

From the information I gathered through my conversations with the students and from their drawings, I can see some of the students' understanding of literacy, which I detail below.

Reading

The students seem to understand that reading is a necessity for school, as many discussed reading at school and for homework. They also seem to understand that they should try to make reading fun and be comfortable while they are doing it, as they each have a favorite room or place at home to read. All of the students enjoy reading in a quiet place where they will not be disturbed, and a place where they have plenty of books from which to choose.. Through their words and drawings the students are demonstrating their knowledge of what they need to be able to read successfully, both at home and at school.

Writing

The idea that writing is a necessity for school and education stands out to me from what the students discussed with me—students who talked about writing at home said that most of it was for school. Some students are beginning to see writing as an enjoyable pastime, or a chance to create their own stories. Several students are even beginning to understand that they can use writing to go along with their reading,

writing a summary of something they have recently read, for example. These students are beginning to see the connection between different aspects of literacy.

Speaking

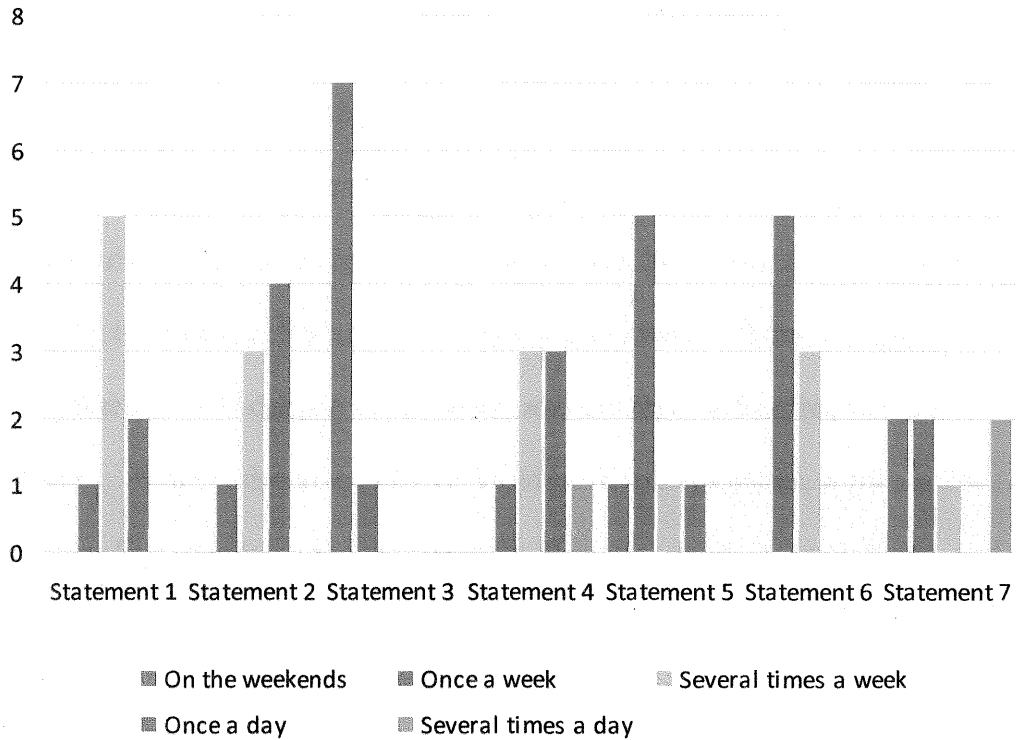
The students, who described what they talk about at home, are beginning to have authentic opportunities to practice their speaking skills, focusing on simple topics of which that they are interested. The students who said they do not talk to anyone at home may have either been too shy to discuss the kinds of things they talk about, or maybe they do not pay much attention to the topics that they talk about with parents or siblings. Another possibilities if that they may have even been caught off-guard by my question, they knew we would be talking about literacy activities but they may not understand speaking to be an aspect of literacy, and in the moment could not recall topics that they talk about at home..

Parent Survey

To gather information from parents, I sent home a survey containing seven Likert scale statements and six open ended response questions (see Appendix C). The Likert scale results coupled with the open ended questions show some interesting results. Figure 4.9 shows the combined results of the parents' responses.

Figure 4.9: Results of Parent Survey

Parent Likert Scale Responses



I should note that for statements three, five and seven on the Likert scale, several parents (three for statement three, one for statement five and one for statement seven) used the response "on the weekends" to mean "occasionally" instead. I asked in the instructions of this section of the survey asked for parents to include any additional information about each statement that they felt was relevant, three parents chose to add notes. Those parents who did write a little extra wrote one or two words next to a few of the statements, they did not go into detail. For the open ended

questions, the parents' responses painted a pretty clear picture of the home literacy environment. Below, I use a letter (A, B, and so on) for each parent that corresponds to his/her child.

Parent A indicated that she engages in reading activities several times a week together with her child, as well as alone herself, and her child alone. She explained that her child reads either on the couch with his sister or in his bed by himself. They visit the public library as a family on the weekends, but Parent A stated that her child does bring books home from school several times a week. Parent A engages in writing that her child can see once a week, and her child writes freely on the weekends. Parent A described that her child has access to books, word searches and a computer. She stated that she watches the Disney channel, Animal Planet, and the Discovery Channel with her child, as well as Disney and Pixar movies. Parent A talks with her child about shows they have seen, something they heard on the news or "different things going on with [their] family and friends."

Parent B said she writes once a week that her child can see, and her child writes freely several times a week. She reads with her child once a week, by herself alone once a day and she sees her child reading several times a day. Parent B described a typical reading experience for her child as being a "minimum of 30 minutes per night." Her child also "looks up one item on the Internet and writes a small summary." Her child has access to the Internet, books and television as far as literacy materials, and as a family they visit a public library on the weekends. Parent B indicated that her child also brings books home from school several times a week.

Parent B and her child watch Disney movies together, and they talk about school and activities for the weekend.

Parent C described her child's typical reading experience to be alone reading each night, however she reads with her child at least once a day, and reads on her own at least once a day. She claimed that her child writes freely once a week, and that her child has the opportunity to see her write once a week. Parent C explained that her child has access to plenty of books, as well as "supervised access to computers." As a family they visit the library once a week, and her child brings home books from school several times a week. Parent C shared that they "often watch G or PG rated movies together as a family." Parent C often talks with her child about his daily experiences and events.

Parent D described her child's typical reading experience as reading by himself with a timer, or reading together alternating pages. She sees her son reading several times a week, and reads on her own several times a week. Parent D indicated that she writes by herself at least once a day, and her child writes only when he has to (she circled on the weekends and wrote "only when he has to"). She also wrote that she watches Disney movies, cartoons and Star Wars movies with her child, and that they talk about soccer and other sports, family and behavior. Parent D shared that her child has access to "hundreds of books of all levels, books on tape, computer, television and writing materials" and also that they visit the library as a family occasionally (she circled on the weekends and wrote "occasionally").

Parent E wrote comments in the available space for five of the Likert scale statements. Parent E indicated that she reads by herself when time permits once a week, her child reads several times a week when prompted, and she reads with her child several times a week. Parent E described a typical reading experience for her child as reading for 15-20 minutes per sitting, and that she encourages reading of chapter books but that her child is "not yet really into them." At home, she talks about "school, work, play, home improvements and pets" with her child. Parent E stated that they watch Nickelodeon, Disney movies and some home improvement type shows. Parent E stated that her child has access to DVDs, computer, television and books, as well as opportunities to visit the library occasionally (circled on the weekends and "occasionally").

Parent F described a typical reading experience for her child as one where she, the parent, reads to the child in bed. She reads with her child several times a week. Parent F shared that she read by herself once a day and she sees her child enjoying reading on her own once a day as well. Parent F said that her child has opportunities to see her writing once a week, and that her child writes freely once a week, too. They visit the public library as a family on the weekends, and her child brings books home from school several times a week. Parent F indicated that her daughter has access to paper, pens/pencils, computer and television.. She watches cooking shows, funny home video, "Jon and Kate Plus Eight," "Little People Big World" and the news with her child. Parent F also talks with her daughter about what happened at school or at home, and also daily events.

Parent G wrote that her daughter has "age-appropriate books as well as a library card. She also has materials that allow her to read, and draw, as well as DVDs and CDs." Parent G indicated that her daughter brings books home from school once a week, and that they visit a public library as a family on the weekends. Parent G wrote that she reads with her child once a day, that she reads by herself once a day, and that her child reads by herself once a day. She described a typical reading experience for her child as reading by herself for 20-30 minutes a day, and that sometimes they (her parents) read to her as well. Parent G indicated that her child has opportunities to see her writing once a week, and that her child writes freely several times a day. She watches the Food Network, Travel Channel, Disney channel and nature programs with her child. When she talks with her daughter, Parent G said that they talk about cooking, decorating and music.

Parent H indicated that her son has opportunities to see her write at home "occasionally" and that her son writes freely "occasionally" as well (she circled on the weekends and wrote "occasionally" for both responses). Parent H stated that she reads with her child several times a week, by herself several times a week, and that she sees her son read by himself once a week. Parent H described a typical reading experience for her son as "reading with parent or sister or by himself." Parent H said her son has access to "books, dry erase board, crayons, markers, paper, craft materials, television, stereo and computer games." Parent H said they visit the library as a family occasionally (she circled on the weekends and wrote "occasionally") and her son brings books home from school once a week. She said she talks about school

activities, sports, family and music with her son, and together they watch Disney or kid movies, the Disney channel, Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon..

Looking Across the Surveys

It is also helpful to look across the parents' perspectives as a way to distinguish similarities and differences.

Reading

Just as reading was a major topic during my conversations with the students, reading was a key topic within the surveys sent home to parents. Five parents (Parents A, D, E, F and H) responded that they read with their child several times a week, (delete the dash) while the other three (Parents B, C and G) indicated that they read with their child several times a day or once a week. From their responses to statement two, it appears that parents are acting as reading effective models for their children. Seven parents (Parents A, B, C, D, F, G and H) responded that they read on their own at home several times a week or even once a day, one parent (Parent E) said he/she read alone once a week.

When it comes to a typical reading experience with their child, three parents (Parents F, G and H) included themselves within the experience, the remaining five (Parents A, B, C, D and E) described their children reading mostly by themselves. Parent B was particularly detailed and even included the writing activity that went along with her child's reading activity. She shared that is was, "minimum of 30

minutes per night and looks up one item on the internet and writes a small summary."

The other descriptions included where the children read (bedroom, living room, kitchen) and about how long they read (20-30 minutes each reading session).

Writing

Writing was another key topic within the parent surveys, just like it was within my conversations with students. According to the Likert scale statements, five children have the opportunity to see their parents (Parents A, B, C, F and G) writing at least once a week, and the other three can see their parents writing once a day (Parents D, E and H) on the weekends or several times a week. As far as the students writing, Parents D and H used "On the weekends" to mean "occasionally," and the remaining parents noted that their child writes once a week (Parents A and C), several times a week (Parent E) and several times a day (Parents B and F). Parent D, who chose "occasionally," also noted that her child writes freely "only when he has to."

Speaking

The parent surveys also contained questions or statements about speaking at home. Every parent went into detail about the typical conversations they hold with their child, the most common topics being school (Parents B, D, E and H), family (Parents A, D and H) and weekend activities (Parents B, F and H). Parent A went into exceptional detail about many different topics of conversation, "We talk about a show we have seen, something we heard on the news. We talk about different things

going on with our family and friends." No parent mentioned discussing literacy activities in particular, other than the general topic of school.

Viewing

Viewing was another important aspect of literacy I included on the parent survey. Every parent described watching television or movies. The most common television genre was cartoons (Parents A, D, E and H), and the most common movies were Disney (Parents A, B, C, D, E and G). Parents also mentioned the Discovery channel, Nickelodeon, Disney channel, TLC and the Food Network. Each parent indicated that the viewing experiences were done as a family. One parent (Parent C) explained, "We often watch G or PG rated movies together as a family." The parents also indicated that their child watches television on his or her own.

Access to Materials

Access to literacy materials was the final key topic I included on the survey.. On the Likert scale statements, most parents (Parents A, B, D, E, F, G and H) marked that they visit the library as a family on the weekends; three of these parents (Parents D, E and H) wrote that what they really meant was "occasionally," while the remaining parents said that they visit the library once a week. Every parent indicated that his/her child had lots of books to read, but not every parent described materials used for other aspects of literacy. Four of the parents (Parents D, F, G and H) described writing materials available for their children at home, the most common

materials being paper and pencils, and six parents (Parents B, D, E, F, G and H) mentioned materials for viewing (television and DVDs). Every child, except Student A, has at least two adults in the home who are available to talk with, and every child, except Student E, has at least one sibling with whom he/she can talk.

Discussion

The eight parents seem to have a holistic view of literacy activities at home, with reading, writing, viewing and speaking. According to their responses, they include aspects of each activity each week; some aspects receive more time than others (for instance reading is more of a focus than the other three aspects). The parents also try to ensure that their child has access to materials that support aspects of literacy, either by having them at home, or by borrowing them from the library.

Comparing Students' and Parents' Perspectives

When I compared the data from the student and his or her respective parent, the information gathered from students and parents was very similar, with only a few variations.

Parent A and **Student A** had the most differences in their answers. For instance, Student A said that he never watches television with anyone else, but his parent described in detail all of the things they watch together (Disney channel, Discovery channel, as well as Disney and Pixar movies). Student A also said that no one reads to him at home, besides him reading to his sister, but his parent indicated

that she reads with him several times a week. Parent A also listed many things that she talks about with her child, but Student A said he does not really talk to people much at home. All other information given by both Parent A and Student A were very similar.

For **Student B** and **Parent B** had one deviation in information, where the student said nobody reads to her at home, while her parent said that she reads with/to her at least once a week. This discrepancy may have been a misunderstanding that the child had of the topic.. All other information given by both Parent B and Student B was very similar.

Student C and **Parent C** were another pair that had very similar perceptions. They had two items that were different from each other. Parent C said that she reads to her child at home at least once a day, while Student C said that no one reads to him at home, they only read to his brother. Student C also said that he does not really talk to anyone at home, but his mother said she talks about daily experiences with him at home. All other information was very similar between Student C and Parent C.

There were no differences between the perceptions of **Parent D** and **Student D**. There were also no differences between the perceptions of **Parent E** and **Student E**.

There were very minimal details that were different between the perceptions of **Parent F** and **Student F**. For instance, Student F said that she normally reads in the basement, however, when describing a typical reading experience for her child, Parent F said she reads in her bed. Another minute detail that differed was around the

topics of conversation in the home: Parent F said the two talk about what happened at school and daily events, while the student said they talk about different places they want to go. All other information given by this pair of student and parent was very similar.

The perceptions of **Student G** and **Parent G** were similar, as were the perceptions of **Parent H** and **Student H**.

Looking Across Conversations, Drawings and Surveys

It is also helpful to look at the pairs as an entire group. There were four students (Students D, E, G and H) who shared information that did not differ from their parents' perspectives, and three other students (Students B, C and F) who differed on only one or two descriptions of their home literacy environment. Student A, the remaining student, differed from his parent on several aspects of literacy (reading, viewing and speaking).

The most common difference in perspective between parent and student centered on reading—the parents (Parents A, B and C) said they read together at home while the students did not. Another discrepancy occurred around talking, two students (Students A and C) said that they did not talk to anyone while their parents indicated that they talked a lot together at home about shows they have watched, "what each person has experienced each day," or things happening with family members. Four of the eight student/parent pairs had perspectives and perceptions that were indicial (50 percent), while seven of eight pairs were very similar (86 percent),

which indicates that students and parents are viewing their home literacy environment in very similar ways.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The question I explored through this research study was: How do second graders and their parents perceive the home literacy environment? I discussed this topic with eight students and gathered information from their parents through a Likert survey. Combined, the information was rich in detail and gave me a clear overview the home literacy environments of these eight families, from both the students' and their parent's perspectives.

Conclusions

Students and Parents Believe That Reading is the Primary Focus at Home

From the data, I understand that this group of students all participated in a variety of reading activities at home, both individual and with family members. The abundant and varied reading activities can be very helpful for these students because "the process of becoming literate begins long before a child enters a formal education environment," (Haney and Hill, 2004, p. 215). The continuation of these types of literary activities and practices within the home can only be even more helpful to the student and his or her success as a literacy student

It is important for students to have parents, or other adults, "who demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation, information and contentment" (as cited in Padak & Rasinski, 2007, p. 350). . The eight parents in this study are offering their children opportunities to see them engaging in authentic

literacy activities at home; doing so enables their children to see how important these activities are on a day-to-day basis.

Furthermore, as Faires, Nichols and Rickelman (2000) posit, "it is important to reiterate the crucial role of parents in the development and education of their children. Research indicates that parent involvement positively affects children's development and education" (p. 200). Parents are so important to their child's success in their education: the more they are involved in their child's educational activities done at home, the more likely their child is to succeed in their scholastic endeavors. The parents involved in this study indicated that they are engaging themselves in literacy activities at home with their children.

Students Know What Helps Them Complete Literacy Activities at Home

All of the students who I spoke with were able to tell me where they enjoy reading and why. They understand what it takes for them to be successful readers at home, and what helps them enjoy reading at their home on their own. Roberts et al. (2005) believed that it is important to pay attention to the frequency of literacy activities and how much a child enjoys it, as this can reveal the student's attitude towards literacy. The fact that the students were able to tell me where they enjoy reading and why, as well as that they like reading a lot at home, shows how interested they are in reading at home.

Parents and Students Understand the Importance of Speaking at Home

It is great that students and their parents or siblings are talking at home, because this creates meaningful opportunities for the students to develop their speaking skills and oral language abilities. Six out of the eight students gave specific details about conversations they had at home, which demonstrates their effort, interest and opportunities. Each of the eight parents listed three to five different topics that are discussed at home, which shows variety as well as their engagement in such conversations. The topics were even varied between parent and student pairs, which shows that there are even more conversations that go on in the home, that one or the other did not share. This engagement in speaking at home demonstrates the understanding that both the students and parents have about the importance of communicating about different topics as a way to learn from each other and perhaps more importantly to practice and refine oral language skills. "Parents are children's first and primary teachers," so any opportunities that parents make to talk with their child will enhance their overall success with literacy. (Faires, Nichols & Rickelman, 2000, p. 195).

Parents Give Opportunities for Their Children to see Them Writing at Home

For six of the eight parent and student pairs, writing was one area of literacy with the least detailed, either in the survey or in my conversations with students. However, I found that all of the students write for homework, and have some opportunities to see their parents write. Some students have other opportunities to

write with a parent or a sibling at home, either while working on homework or creating a story.

The students all write by themselves (either for homework or for pleasure) and many of them see their parents are writing. Viewing their parents engaged in a writing activity provides a literacy role model in the home. Some students, however, did not know what their parents were writing. Students E and F had opportunities to see their parents were writing "bills," so they were able to understand one kind of writing that parents do on a day to day basis later in life. It is important to pay attention to how often children see their parental figures reading for enjoyment, since parents or guardians are a major role model for children and children base a lot of their attitudes on those of their parents (Johnson et al., 2008). The opportunities that parents provide for their children help them see how important the act of writing is, and hopefully encourage the children to continue working hard to develop their own skills.

Ideas for My Future Classrooms

Given the very similar responses from both parents and students, I believe that the data could be very useful for a teacher as he or she begins planning a literacy curriculum. If I had conducted this study in my own classroom, I could use the results to introduce additional literacy opportunities and experience. For example, I could communicate with parents about the importance of being models in terms of literacy practices for their children. Some suggestions I could make, so that it would

not seem overwhelming or too time consuming, would be to encourage the parents to sit with their child as they did homework and do their own work, or sit near their child while they read alone and also read something on their own. This would not only show support for their child and the work he or she is doing to become a successful reader or writer, but it would also show the student that the skills he or she is working on go beyond the classroom into real life, and that he or she will use the skills into adulthood.

I would also encourage students to, after they read a story with their parents or sibling, to talk about the book with them. I would suggest that they ask whoever they read with what they liked about the story, and in turn share what they enjoyed or any questions they might have. I might even add a section to my weekly reading log about discussing a book with a parent.

I would also continue to discuss the topics from the initial conversation in this study with my students and their parents to ensure that I understand the home literacy environment from their perspectives. I would hold informal conferences with students about each topic at other times during the year to see if their views have changed at all, and to see how I need to change my teaching.. I would also continue to talk to parents at parent teacher conferences about the topics..

I would like to try and create authentic opportunities for students to integrate aspects of viewing and writing with other aspects already being practiced frequently at home. Perhaps asking students to work with a parent or sibling to write a summary of a show or movie they have recently seen together, which offers an

opportunity for students to see someone else writing at home, as well as provide and opportunity to discuss something they have viewed to gain a deeper meaning and practice their speaking skills. I could ask the students to do the same type of activity with a book he has read. The student could work with a parent to write a short summary, or a different ending, or something else creative to do with the book. This would offer the opportunity to discuss writing with someone at home.

Recommendations for Future Research

Data Collection Method to Provide a More Holistic View

My methods of data collection—drawings, conversations, and a Likert survey—yielded detailed and helpful data in a short amount of time. I believe that I could easily use these methods within my own work as a classroom teacher, and other teacher could benefit from them as well. Information about students' home literacy environment sought from multiple perspectives in a short period of time could be very informative as I plan instruction and make curriculum choices. However, in future research, it is important that I, and other researchers, consider a wider variety of data collection methods in order to ensure a more holistic view of the home literacy environment. Other ways to collect data for this kind of research could include discussions with parents at parent conferences and back to school nights, teaming up with community resources, the public library for example, to help build relationships grounded in family literacy, or inviting the students (and their parents)

to record the amount of conversations, or writing activities or what they are viewing for a week. We could then use this data in class as a part of graphing activity.

Home Visits as Another Way to Understand Family Literacy

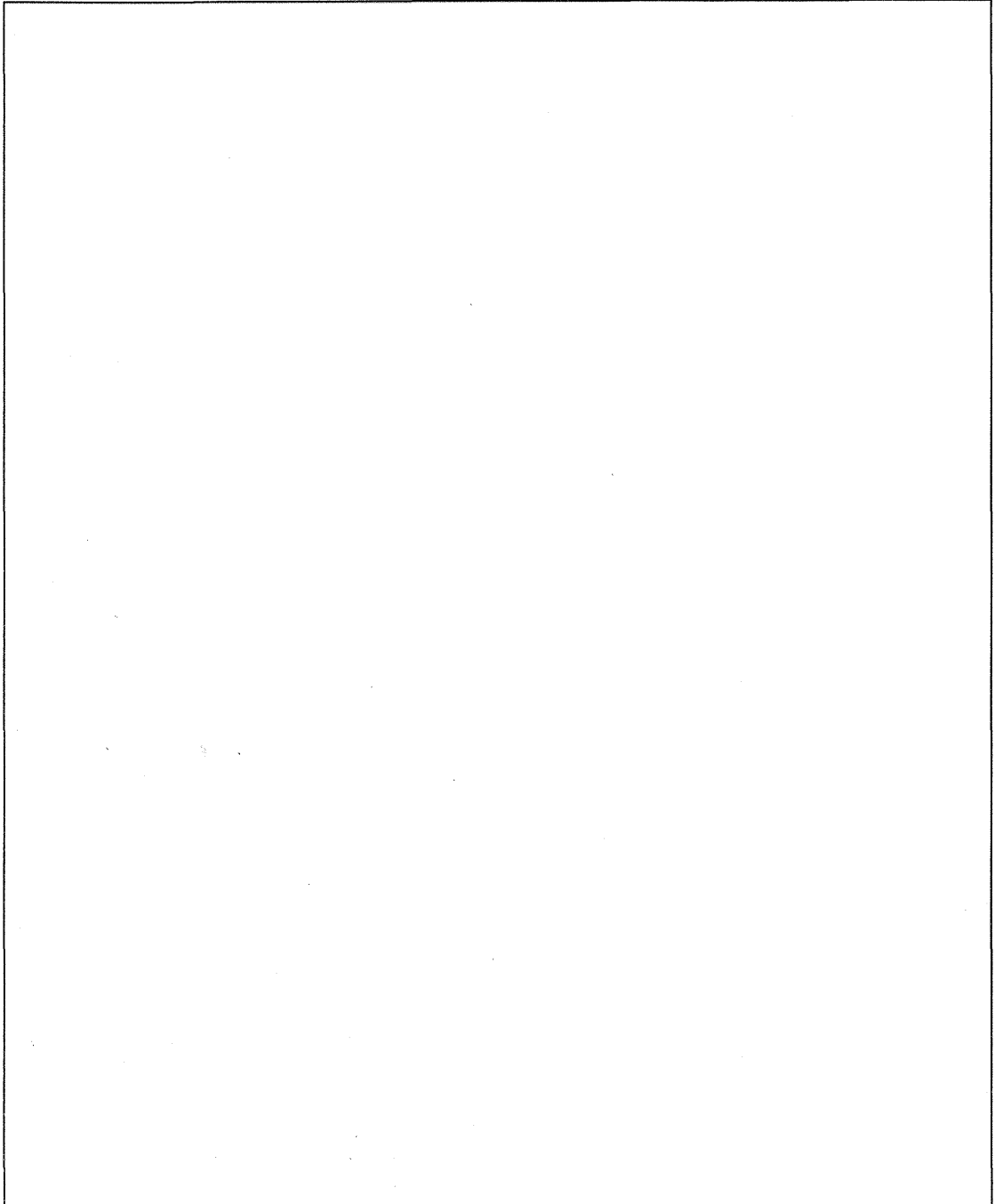
For anyone wishing to pursue more research on this topic, I would recommend visiting homes, or even just having face-to-face discussions with the parents to gain an even deeper understanding of the home literacy environment of each student and family. Being able to see the literacy activities engaged in at home first hand would help any teacher better understand what really goes on at home, in regard to literacy, for their students. Family literacy and the home literacy environment may be interpreted differently by a parent. In order to help a teacher more fully understand that environment and to create a student centered classroom based on home experiences teachers should see literacy activities in action for themselves in addition to the conversations with parents and students, as a way to support the parents' and students' verbal descriptions. However, if time does not permit the classroom teacher to visit each and every one of his or her students' homes to gather necessary information about their students, then the data collection methods used in this study, and mentioned above, could be used to gather some quick information so that a more informed, student and family centered literacy curriculum could be devised.

Appendix A
Student Literacy Drawing Page

Name _____

Date _____

Please draw a picture of yourself reading or writing at home.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw a picture of themselves reading or writing at home.

Appendix B
Anticipated Conversation Topics with Second Graders

Prompt for beginning conversation about picture: Could you describe for me what is happening in your picture?

- ~Reading alone
- ~Reading with someone
- ~Seeing people read
- ~Writing alone
- ~Writing with someone
- ~Seeing people write
- ~Watching television alone/with someone
- ~Talking with people at home
- ~Access to materials like books, magazines, newspaper, writing paper, pencils, television/movies (at
home, or visiting libraries)
- ~Favorite places to read/write/view at home
- ~Preference of literacy activities at home or at school
- ~What kinds of chores at home to keep it clean--who does the cleaning

Appendix C **Parent Survey**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Thank you for taking a few minutes to answer these questions. For the last five questions, please provide as much detail as possible. Please return it to school with your child by _____.

Please circle the number which best describes your actions and understandings related to the seven statements below. In the space below each statement, please share specific examples.

1	2	3
On the Weekends	Once a Week	Several Times a Week
4	5	
Once a Day	Several Times a Day	

1) I read with my child at home.	1	2	3	4	5
2) I read by myself at home.	1	2	3	4	5
3) As a family, we visit a public library.	1	2	3	4	5
4) My child enjoys reading at home.	1	2	3	4	5
5) My child has opportunities to see me writing at home.	1	2	3	4	5

6) My child brings books home from school. 1 2 3 4 5

7) My child writes freely at home. 1 2 3 4 5

8) Please describe items that your child has access to at home that enable him/her to engage activities related to reading, writing, listening and viewing.

9) Please describe a typical reading experience for your child at home.

10) What kinds of television shows or movies do you watch with your child at home?

11) What are some topics of frequent conversation in your home?

12) How many adults and children live in your home?

Appendix D
Cover Letters and Informed Consent Forms

May 13, 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Education and Human Development at The College at Brockport, SUNY. For my thesis project, I am conducting a study regarding the literacy environment within the homes of the students in Mrs. X's classroom. As part of my study, I would like to discuss this topic with your child, as well as his/her classmates.

If you grant consent for your child to participate in this study, she or he will be interviewed for approximately 15 minutes during normal school hours. The topics of the discussion I have with your child will focus on their reading, writing, speaking and viewing habits at home. A copy of the topics to be covered are attached for your review.

I will tape record each conversation as well as take brief notes during the sessions. No information recorded will be assessed or graded by the classroom teacher, and all data will be kept anonymous in my study.

Through these conversations I am hoping to learn about your child's habits, likes and dislikes of literacy activity at home. I also hope to learn about the types of literacy materials he or she has access to and the kinds of literacy activities he or she may be exposed to through modeling by adults in the home.

The attached Guardian Consent form includes information about your child's rights as a project participant, including how I will protect his/her privacy. Please read the form carefully. If you are willing to allow your child's participation, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statement by Monday, May 18th.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathy Gagnon
Graduate Student, College at Brockport, SUNY

CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWING STUDENT

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am currently a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY completing a master's thesis for the Department of Education and Human Development. As part of the requirements for this thesis, I am conducting a research study to explore the perceptions that second graders and their parents have about their home literacy environment.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study, I will talk with your child about his/her perspectives during regular school hours.

In order for your child to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in the project. If you would like for your child to participate in the project, and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided at the end. You may change your mind at any time, and your child may leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.

I understand that:

- a. My child's participation is voluntary and he/she has the right to refuse to answer any questions. This will not affect my child's grade or class standing in any way.
- b. My child's name will not be recorded in any notes. If any publication results from this research, he/she would not be identified by name. Results will be given through the use of pseudonyms, so neither the participants nor the school can be identified. I may choose to have my child not be audio taped, and may indicate so below.
- c. The only anticipated minimal risk is the time it will take to complete conversations.
- d. My child will be audiotape during a conversation with the person conducting the research. It is estimated that this will take 12-15 minutes. The researcher will transcribe the audiotapes.
- e. The results will be used for the completion of a thesis paper by the primary researcher.
- f. Data, audio tapes, and transcribed notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Only the primary investigator will have access to the tapes and corresponding materials. Data, audio tapes, transcribed notes and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been accepted and approved.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child's participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.

If you have any questions, you may contact:

Primary Researcher:
Kathy Gagnon
Graduate Student
The College at Brockport, SUNY
kecke2@brockport.edu

Thesis Advisor:
Dr. Don Halquist
The College at Brockport, SUNY
dhalquis@brockport.edu
(585)395-5550

Child's Name _____

I agree to allow my child to participate and understand that my child will be audio taped.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

-OR-

I agree to allow my child to participate in this study, but do not want he/she to be audio taped.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

May 13, 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Education and Human Development at The College at Brockport, SUNY. For my thesis project, I am conducting a study to learn more about the different types of literacy in the home environment of second graders. As part of this study, I would like to include the thoughts of the parents on this topic.

If you grant consent to participate in this study, I will send a survey home with your child for you to complete. The topics of the survey focus on reading, writing, speaking and viewing habits at home. I will keep all data collected from these surveys confidential. No data gathered will affect your child's grade or class standing.

The attached Consent form includes information about your rights as a project participant, including how I will protect your privacy. Please read the form carefully. If you are willing to participate, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statement and returning it to school by Monday, May 18th.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathy Gagnon
Graduate Student
The College at Brockport, SUNY

CONSENT FOR PARENT SURVEY

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am currently a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY completing a master's thesis for the Department of Education and Human Development. As part of the requirements for this thesis, I am conducting a research study to explore the perceptions that second graders and their parents have about literacy in their home environment.

If you agree to participate in this research study, I will send a survey home with your child for you to complete. I anticipate that it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey.

In order for you to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. If you would like to participate in the project, and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided at the end. You may change your mind at any time, and you may leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.

I understand that:

- a. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions.
- b. My confidentiality is guaranteed. My name will not be recorded in any notes. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name. Results will be given through the use of pseudonyms, so neither the participants nor the school can be identified.
- c. The only personal risk is the amount of time it will take to complete the survey.
- d. The results of the survey will be used for the completion of a thesis paper by the primary researcher.
- e. Data, audio tapes, and transcribed notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Only the primary researcher will have access to the tapes and corresponding materials. Data, audio tapes, transcribed notes and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been accepted and approved.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to participate in this study. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.

If you have any questions, you may contact:

Primary Researcher:
Kathy Gagnon
Graduate Student
The College at Brockport, SUNY
kecke2@brockport.edu

Thesis Advisor:
Dr. Don Halquist
The College at Brockport, SUNY
dhalquis@brockport.edu
(585)395-5550

I agree to participate in this study

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E
Statement of Assent
To Be Read to Second Grade Students

My name is Kathy Gagnon. I am a student at The College at Brockport, SUNY. I would like to learn what you and your family read, write, talk about and watch at home. You and I will talk about those ideas, and our conversation will be recorded using a tape recorder--I might also be taking some notes while we talk.

If you decide to let me learn about what you do at home, I won't write down your name or let anyone else know who you are. When I write about my study, I will only say what you and your classmates talked about.

Your parent or guardian has given permission for you to take part in this study, but it's up to you to decide if you would like to participate. If you would like to take part in my study, but change your mind later on, you can tell your teacher or me that you have changed your mind. It is okay to change your mind at any time.

If it is okay with you for me to find out about what you and your family read, write, talk about and watch at home, you can write your name on the first line below. Under your name you can write today's date which is _____.

Thank you very much,

Kathy Gagnon

Name: _____

Date: _____

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